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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the conceptualization of interpersonal power and offers a relational definition and measure of power. A distinction is made between "power attempts" (domineering message behavior) and "power" (transactional patterns of dominance). To test this distinction, 45 husband/wife dyads were randomly sampled from a midwestern metropolitan area, and two types of data were collected: first, self-report information concerning the marital relationship was obtained from each husband and wife separately; second, interaction data were obtained by tape-recording, transcribing, and coding each couple's discussions of four family-related topics. The findings support the views that domineeringness and dominance are separate control variables and that different dyadic patterns of satisfaction and interaction style are associated with these two dimensions. (RL)

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A TRANSACTIONAL DEFINITION AND MEASURE OF POWER

by

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A TRANSACTIONAL DEFINITION AND MEASURE OF POWER

Abstract

This paper attempts to clarify the conceptualization of interpersonal power and offers a relational level definition and measure of power. A distinction is made between power attempts, domineering message behavior, and power, transactional patterns of dominance. The findings support (1) that domineeringness and dominance are separate control variables, and (2) that different dyadic patterns of satisfaction and interaction style are associated with these two dimensions.

A TRANSACTIONAL DEFINITION AND MEASURE OF POWER

Power is a major dimension of interactional studies, whether studied from a sociological, clinical or communication perspective. Yet it has been an evasive dimension to tie down empirically; it has been many things to many people. At a general level, most definitional statements reflect the classic Weberian notion that power refers to the ability to affect social outcomes.¹ But at the research level, power has been operationalized in a variety of ways and largely in unsatisfactory ways (Rollins and Bahr, 1976; Cromwell and Olson (eds.), 1975; Turk, 1974; Olson and Rabinsky, 1972; Safilios-Rothchild, 1970).

The basic problem is that power has predominately been viewed--and thus measured--as a monadic, static variable. It has typically been treated as an individual trait or as an individual's behavior rather than as a property of social relationships.² Yet it seems intuitively obvious that power cannot be unilaterally possessed and expressed; it can only be manifested in a social context, in a transactional process that requires the presence of at least two. Until power is viewed as a transactional dimension, it will remain erroneously and inadequately operationalized. Unless power is defined and measured at a relational level, the usefulness of the construct is limited and the problem of noncomparable measures and inconsistent "findings" will remain.³

The purposes of this paper are: (1) to offer a transactional definition of power, (2) to distinguish power attempts (control maneuvers which are domineering) from power (control patterns of dominance), (3) to outline interactional measures of both control maneuvers and control pattern distinctions, and (4) to offer beginning findings utilizing these measurements.

A Definition of Power

The psychological approach to human behavior has for too long overshadowed the most basic aspect of human relations--the systemic nature of human interaction. An adequate conceptualization of power must incorporate the basic notion that social relationships are co-defined. Interaction is a joint negotiation process and system properties lie not in individual behavior but in mutual interactive effects. These basic assumptions have been given homage in vague, general terms, but tend to be forgotten when attempts are made to research the human scene.

Our view of power is that it is an emergent pattern arising out of behavioral exchange. The proposed measure is based on communicative acts. Individual action is a necessary condition for a particular power definition, but the resultant pattern can only be described in the mutual exchange of message behaviors and not in any single given behavior.

Control is one of the central dimensions of communication systems (Millar and Rogers, 1976; Shutz, 1958; Brown, 1965) and refers to those aspects of message exchange by which interactors reciprocally define their relative positions to one another. Control maneuvers are typically associated with "one-upness" (Watzlawick et al., 1967; Sluzki and Beavin, 1965). While this type of control maneuver is the concern of this paper, it must be stressed that one-down movements are also controlling maneuvers, but of a different nature. In the reciprocal defining of control patterns, a one-down movement may be just as directing, although referred to as submissive, as a one-up statement. If one individual consistently transmits one-down messages, then the other is often "forced" to respond in a one-up manner if the interaction is to continue. In this manner, one's choices of action may be constrained, i.e., controlled, by the other's one-down movements.

Explicitly or implicitly, message exchange involves not only ego casting, which implies a particular relational definition, but also alter casting, implying the appropriate response (Weinstein and Deutschberger, 1964). Thus, individuals can, and do, send defining statements, but the fate of the offered definition lies in the response to the message. To illustrate, when a one-up control message is transmitted, a position of dominance is not established until and unless it is accepted by a one-down response. A one-down message indicates that the definition is accepted by alter, and ego is in a dominant position. If, however, alter responds with a similar message, that is with a one-up statement, alter is rejecting ego's definition and ego is not in a power position. If ego and alter exchange a series of one-up messages, both are giving off domineering statements, but neither is dominant in relation to the other.⁴

Domineering behavior is defined as the transmission of one-up messages--verbal statements which claim the right to be dominant. Dominance is defined as the resultant phenomenon of the acceptance by alter of the domineering messages given by ego. The more one person asserts one-up relational definitions that are accepted, the more dominant that person is in that interactive system at that time and in that setting.⁵ The more one attempts to assert one-up definitions that are not accepted, the more domineering that person is said to be. The distinguishing aspect between domineering behavior and dominance is that the former is a monadic variable and the latter dyadic. The definition and measurement of control movements reside in the message exchange, i.e., in the transactional patterns of ongoing messages.

An Operationalization of Power

In order to explicate our measure of power, we need to outline a

recently developed relational communication coding system. The coding scheme describes the "command" aspects of a dyadic system's verbal behavior. This system has been detailed elsewhere (Rogers and Farace, 1975; Ericson and Rogers, 1973), and will only be summarized here.

The relational communication analysis begins with the assumption that messages contain both a relational component. Ruesch and Bateson (1951) referred to these two types of meaning within messages as the "report" (content) aspect, which conveys information, and the "command" (relational) aspect, which defines the nature of the relationship between the interactors on an ongoing basis. Relational measures focus on communication properties that exist only at the transactional (message exchange) level. In this coding scheme, the exchange of paired sequential messages over time is the basic unit of analysis.

Three progressive steps are involved in deriving the transactional measures. First, each message in an ongoing interaction is categorized according to grammatical form and response mode. Second, control directions (e.g., one-up, one-across, and one-down) are assigned to these categories, and thirdly, message control directions are combined to form transactional types.

Following Sluzki and Beavin's (1965) premise that the control definition of a message is rooted in both the grammatical and response form, a classification scheme was designed to numerically code each of these aspects for any given verbal message. The grammatical codes utilized are: (1) assertion, (2) question, (3) talk-over, (4) noncomplete, and (5) other. The response codes are: (1) support, (2) nonsupport, (3) extension, (4) answer, (5) instruction, (6) order, (7) disconfirmation, (8) topic change, (9) initiation-termination, (0) other.

In the coding procedures, a three-digit code is assigned to each message. The first digit designates the speaker, the second refers to the grammatical form, and the third indicates the response mode of the message relative to the previous message. In this manner, any communicative exchange can be represented by a series of sequentially ordered numerical codes.⁶

The next step is to translate the numerical codes into control directions. These assignments are made on the basis of whether a message is: (a) an attempt to assert definitional rights, which is designated one-up ($\uparrow$); (b) a request or an acceptance of the other's definition of the relationship, designated as one-down ($\downarrow$); or (c) a non-demanding, non-accepting, leveling movement, which is designated as one-across ($\rightarrow$). The control directions of message types are given in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Control Directions of Message Types

	support	non-support	extension	answer	instruction	order	disconfirmation	topic change	initiates-terminates	other
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
assertion 1	$\downarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\rightarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\rightarrow$
question 2	$\downarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\downarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\downarrow$
talk-over 3	$\downarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\downarrow$
non-complete 4	$\downarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\rightarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\rightarrow$	$\rightarrow$
other 5	$\downarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\rightarrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\uparrow$	$\rightarrow$

This control matrix forms the basis for obtaining transactional information, the third step in the coding procedure. By combining the control direction of one message with the control direction of a contiguous message, the transactional concepts of symmetry, complementarity, and transition are operationalized. The similarities or differences between the paired message control directions are used to define basic types of control patterns. The nine transactional or relational units resulting from the combinations of the three control directions are given in Figure 2.

In a complementary transaction, the control directions are different and directionally opposite; the definition of the relationship offered by one interactor is accepted by the other. A symmetrical transaction, where the control directions are the same, involves one interactor behaving toward the other as the other has behaved toward him; thus, there is a similarity of definition by the two individuals. In a transitional transaction, where the paired directions are different but not opposite, one of the interactors offers or responds with a neutralized control definition and thus, minimizes the issue of control.

Figure 2: Control Configurations of the Nine Types of Transactional Units

Control Direction of Speaker A's Message	Control Direction of Speaker B's Message		
	One-up (↑)	One-down (↓)	One-across (→)
One-up (↑)	1. (↑↑) Competitive Symmetry	4. (↑↓) Complementarity	7. (↑→) Transition
One-down (↓)	2. (↓↑) Complementarity	5. (↓↓) Submissive Symmetry	8. (↓→) Transition
One-across (→)	3. (→↑) Transition	6. (→↓) Transition	9. (→→) Neutralized Symmetry

Each of the transactional units provides a measure of the interactors' relationship vis-a-vis one another. In this paper we will focus on the control directions and transactional types that are the basis for our definitions and measures of domineering behavior and dominance.⁷

Domineering Measures

Domineering behavior is operationally defined by the number of one-up maneuvers an individual makes in an ongoing interchange. On the basis of the relational coding scheme, domineering behavior can be indexed in several ways; two are mentioned here. A general measure is the proportion of one-up messages an individual makes during a conversation--that is, the number of one-up codes divided by the total number of messages transmitted by the individual ($\text{Domineering}_1 = \uparrow / \text{total messages}$). A second measure is the ratio of one-up statements to one-down statements made by an individual ($\text{Domineering}_2 = \uparrow / \downarrow$). This ratio focuses on an individual's own patterns of assertion and submission rather than just frequency of assertions.

Dominance Measures

Dominance measures are based on the offering of one-up maneuvers which are accepted by one-down statements or at least not resisted by a similar one-up response. Again, there are several measures possible.

First, what we call pure dominance is the percent of all one-up statements made by an individual that are followed by a one-down response from the other. In this complementary transact, the assertion of one interactant has been confirmed by the other. For each participant, the pure dominance score is the proportion of one-down responses given by the other to all one-up messages offered ($\text{Pure Dominance} = \text{given } \downarrow, \% \uparrow$).

A second set of dominance measures resides in the comparisons of the actors' acceptance and resistance to one-up assertions. Given a one-up message, this dimension can be conceptualized as a percentage ratio of one-up complementary transactions ($\uparrow\uparrow$) to one-up symmetrical ($\uparrow\uparrow$) transactions. Because of zero frequencies in these cells for some of the interactions, the use of this measure was ruled out. However, difference scores can as readily be used as an index of comparative amounts of compliance and resistance. The difference between the percent of one-up complementarity ($\uparrow\uparrow$), indicating compliance, and the percentage of one-up symmetrical ($\uparrow\uparrow$), indicating resistance, was figured for each interactor. Comparative dominance is measured by these difference scores (Comparative Dominance = $\% \uparrow\uparrow - \% \uparrow\uparrow$).

A final measure, total dominance, is based on all transactional types in which one person's message is at a higher control position than the other person's response message. It is a measure of an individual's relative "upness" or power in that relationship. Operationally, total dominance is a combination of each speaker's percent of one-up, one-down transactions; one-up, one-across transactions; and one-across, one down transactions (Total Dominance = $\uparrow\downarrow + \uparrow\rightarrow + \rightarrow\downarrow$).⁸

Data Base

The subjects for the study are forty-five husband and wife dyads randomly sampled from a midwestern metropolitan area. During a personal interview in their home, two types of data were collected. First, self-report information concerning the marital relationship was obtained from each husband and wife separately; second, interaction data, the focus of the present analysis, were obtained by tape-recording each couple's discussion of four different family related topics. These conversations were tran-

scribed and coded according to the relational communication coding procedures.

Domineering and Dominance Interrelations

To explore the relationship between domineering behavior and dominance, Pearsonian correlations were run between the various measures outlined in this paper. These correlations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix for Domineering and Dominance Measures

	%↑		↑/↓		↑↓		↑↓-↑↑		↑↑↑↑↑↑↑↑	
	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H
Domineering ₁ %↑ : W	1.00	.08	.74	.23	-.09	-.54	-.05	-.64	.36	-.66
H		1.00	-.15	.70	-.16	.05	-.50	-.03	-.56	.29
Domineering ₂ ↑/↓ : W			1.00	-.08	.10	-.59	.24	-.62	.57	-.85
H				1.00	-.44	-.04	-.54	-.08	-.52	.33
Pure Dominance ↑↓ : W					1.00	.07	.79	-.05	.41	-.28
H						1.00	-.16	.92	-.39	.65
Comparative Dominance ↑↓-↑↑ : W							1.00	-.15	.61	-.42
H								1.00	-.41	.69
Total Dominance ↑↓ + ↑↑ + ↑↓ : W									1.00	-.71
H										1.00

Level of Significance (Pearsonian r's): .25 < .05
 (n = 45) .35 < .01
 .44 < .001

Looking first at the domineering variables, we are interested in the degree of correlation between the two proposed measures of domineeringness. The correlations between the percent of one-up messages and the percent of

one-up to one-down messages was .70 and .74 for husbands and wives respectively. As expected, these correlations are relatively high. The first measure, the percent of one-up messages, will be used in reporting our initial findings concerning domineering behavior.

Secondly, we are interested in the degree of association between the domineering measures and the dominance measures. There is little correlation, except with total dominance, between the domineering and dominance measures for husbands and wives. We would expect to find some correlation between the measures since a one-up statement (i.e., domineering statement) is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for dominance to exist, but it is clear that a high level of domineeringness does not result in a high level of dominance. The lack of strong association between these two measures supports and offers construct validity to our notion that domineering behavior and dominance are different phenomena--a point we feel is extremely important, since so much of the empirical work in the area of power has ignored the relational level difference and operationalized power as an individual trait. Thus, it is our contention, now with empirical backing, that most of the studies of "power" and the reported findings deal with domineering behavior and not with the concept of power.

The intercorrelations between the dominance measures are quite high. The correlations between pure dominance and comparative dominance is .92 and .79 respectively for husbands and wives. Compared to the pure and comparative measures, total dominance--being a composite measure of (↑↑↑↑↑↑) transactions--incorporates lesser levels of "one-upness." The correlations between total dominance, pure, and comparative dominance range from .41 to .69. As expected, these correlations are high, but of a lesser association than that between the other two measures. In reporting findings concerning

dominance, the comparative dominance measure based on the difference between compliance and resistance, will be used.

Initial Findings

Two types of data were analyzed in relation to domineeringness and dominance: (1) husband and wife self-report data on marital satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and marital role strain, and (2) message and interaction data on supportive and non-supportive statements, successful talk-overs, questions, length of discussions and transactional rigidity-flexibility.

Marital satisfaction was indexed by husband and wife ratings on a 1-to-5 scale of their satisfaction with their marriage. A composite of 15 Likert-type items was used to measure communication satisfaction. Role strain refers to perceived dyadic inequity, operationalized as the sum of the differences between each spouse's description of marital role expectations and their description of actual role performances.

Self-Report Data: An interesting difference in the marital profile, depending on which spouse is domineering or dominant, was found in the satisfaction indexes. Strong inverse relationships were found between wife domineering behavior and marital and communication satisfaction, and a direct relation with the level of role strain (see Table 2). Higher levels of wife domineeringness were associated with lower marital and communication satisfaction for both spouses, and with higher role strain. No correlation existed between these variables and husband domineeringness.

Looking at the correlations of satisfaction and dominance, we find a reversal of the domineering patterns. Higher marital satisfaction and lower role strain were related to husband dominance. No significant correlations were found to exist between wife dominance and the satisfac-

Table 2: Correlation Between Satisfaction and Strain Indexes,
Domineeringness and Dominance

		Domineeringness		Dominance	
		Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband
Marital Satisfaction:	W	-.39	.09	.06	.20
	H	-.42	.01	.11	.26
Communication Satisfaction:	W	-.26	.07	.09	-.14
	H	-.20	-.01	.20	-.03
Dyadic Role Strain		.35	.02	-.08	-.22

Level of Significance (Pearsonian r's): .25 < .05
 (n = 45) .35 < .01
 .44 < .001

tion or role strain indexes. The dominance measures were not clearly associated with communication satisfaction, except a trend towards husbands' expressing more satisfaction when the wife was dominant.

There appears to be quite a distinct pattern between the satisfaction indexes and the control variables. In general, lower levels of satisfaction were associated with wife domineeringness and higher satisfaction levels were associated with husband dominance.

Interaction Data: Turning to the analysis of the message and interaction data, it is clear that we must be careful in our interpretation of the data because of the interrelatedness of the control measures and the form and response mode of the message. However, within these precautions we can gain information concerning the type of message behavior and exchange styles that are associated with the different control movements and patterns. This data is presented in Table 3.

We would expect to find support statements (i.e., agreement, acceptance, approval) negatively associated with domineeringness. This was true for wife domineeringness with a $-.60$ for wife support and a $-.23$ for husband support. But when the husband was domineering we found no significant correlation with wife support ($-.10$) and unexpectedly, a positive correlation with husband support ($.25$). The data suggest that when wives manifest power attempts, they offer few accompanying support statements to husbands; but when husbands exert power attempts, they also give supportive statements to their wives. Perhaps, this is one reason for low satisfaction being related to wife domineeringness, but not to husband domineeringness.

When the husband is dominant we find a stronger correlation with wife giving support ($.62$) than we do with husband giving support when the wife is dominant ($.43$). Again this may relate to why husband dominance was more strongly related to the satisfaction indexes than wife dominance.

Table 3: Correlations Between Message and Transaction Indexes,
Domineeringness and Dominance

	Domineeringness		Dominance	
	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband
Support: W	-.60	-.10	-.08	.62
H	-.23	.25	.43	.13
Non-Support: W	.16	.44	-.37	-.20
H	.08	.53	-.32	-.10
Talk-Overs: W	.61	-.17	.01	-.22
H	-.14	.50	-.16	.09
Successful Talk-Overs: W	.43	-.08	.11	-.45
H	.17	.45	-.13	-.03
Questions: W	.06	.43	-.31	.16
H	.00	-.02	.25	-.03
Discussion Length	.17	-.26	.17	-.26
Transactional Rigidity	-.24	-.65	.16	.09

Level of Significance (Pearsonian r's): .25 < .05
 (n = 45) .35 < .01
 .44 < .001

Non-support statements (i.e., rejections, disagreements, demands) for both husband and wife were highly correlated with husband domineeringness (.53 and .44 respectively), while unrelated to the domineeringness of wife (.08 and .16). In comparing husband and wife behavior we see that when the husband is domineering, the wife gives considerably more non-supportive statements than the husband does when the wife is domineering. It appears as if the wife "fights" the one-up statements made by the husband much more than the husband does when the wife makes one-up statements.

With dominance and non-supportive statements, however, there is an inverse relationship particularly for wives (-.37 for wife dominance and -.20 for husband dominance) and to a lesser degree for husbands (-.32 for wife dominance and -.10 for husband dominance). Thus, we find a much higher degree of non-supportiveness associated with domineering behavior than with dominance.

An analysis of talk-over behavior shows that both the total number of talk-overs and the number of successful talk-overs made by a husband and a wife are associated with their domineering behavior. A talk-over refers to a verbal interruption or intrusion made while the other person is talking, and when successful, the other yields the "floor" to the interrupter who continues to talk. Total talk-over behavior correlated .61 and .50 respectively with wife and husband domineeringness, and .43 and .45 for successful talk-overs. Thus, interrupting and taking over the speaker position is a characteristic of a domineering style.

With dominance, only in the case of husband dominance was there an association with talk-overs. Dominance of the husband was correlated with fewer successful talk-overs by the wife (-.45). With wife dominance there was no correlation to husband talk-over behavior.

Considering questions, it appears that there is a different pattern of usage by husbands and wives. The use of questions by wives was associated with husband domineeringness, but not with husband dominance. Questions by husbands were not related to wife domineeringness, but were associated more with wife dominance.

An analysis of the length of discussion time between husband and wife pairs found that with both wife domineering and dominant behavior, there was a trend toward longer discussions, but with husband domineering and dominant behavior there was a trend toward shorter discussions. An intuitive interpretation suggests that issues are perhaps more "settled" when the husband is the domineering or dominant member, thereby requiring less time to "complete" a discussion topic.

With both husband and wife domineeringness, a less rigid, more flexible transaction pattern was evident. The rigid-flexible continuum refers to the frequency with which the assertion and acceptance of definitional rights alternate between the members of the system. With dominance there was only a slight trend toward a more rigid, "fixed," pattern of interaction. Again a suggestive interpretation is that with domineering behavior, where definitional rights are offered but not accepted, the couple's interaction pattern is a less "settled" pattern.

These research findings are considered to be a first probe in our investigation of dyadic power relations. The conceptualizations and operations put forward appear to have value. With both the self-report and interaction data, significant differences were found between domineering and dominant behavior of dyadic members.

Summary

This paper has outlined conceptual and operational definitions that

clearly distinguish between power attempts and power, respectively referred to as domineering behavior and dominance. The empirical evidence suggest that (1) domineeringness and dominance are in actuality different phenomena and that (2) very different patterns of role strain, system satisfaction, and interaction styles are correlated with these two control variables.

Domineering behavior of the wife is associated with lower levels of satisfaction and higher levels of role strain. Husband domineering behavior is associated with more non-supportive statements and shorter discussion time. Domineering behavior of both husband and wife were found to correlate with more successful talk-overs and more flexible transaction patterns.

Dominance, especially husband dominance, is related to higher levels of satisfaction, lower levels of role strain, more supportive statements, and fewer non-supportive statements.

These initial findings are suggestive and supportive of the importance of continued investigation of the relationship between differing forms of control and the functioning of relational systems.

Footnotes

¹In Weber's words, power refers to "the chance of a man or group to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Gerth and Mills, 1946: 180).

²As Cromwell and Olson (1975) have recently stated, power is usually defined as a property of individuals, but rarely as a property of social systems.

³More than a decade ago, Emerson (1962), for one, suggested a dyadic conceptualization when he explicated the notion that "power resides implicitly in the other's dependency." Emerson's work stressed that power resides in the joint effects of the relationship.

⁴This type of exchange configuration is what Watzlawick et al. (1967) refer to as escalating symmetry and Lederer and Jackson (1968) called status struggles.

⁵The right to define will typically vary over situations and content areas.

⁶In the initial study of 65 dyads utilizing this three-digit code, the reliability figures ranged from .68 to 1.00. The average reliability across all comparisons was .86 (Ericson and Rogers, 1973). In a second study of 112 dyads, the intercoder reliabilities ranged from .79 to 1.00, with an average of .89 (unpublished reports, 1976). The coding procedure provides a relatively simple, objective, and reliable measure of the control defining aspects of relationships.

⁷In other studies, all of the transactional types have been utilized to describe and differentiate the dyadic communication patterns of husbands and wives (Rogers, 1972; Ericson, 1972; Millar, 1973; Parks, Farace, and Rogers, 1975).

⁸All of the measures can be expressed in a ratio form for each dyad. This type of analysis is part of our continued research.

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